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The Honorable John Spellman
Carney, Bradley, Spellman
700 Fifth Avenue, Suite 5800
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Dear John:

I always appreciate hearing from you and I thank you for taking the time to express your concerns to me regarding Washington's open blanket primary. I am disheartened that our current system will undoubtedly be altered for legal reasons. Ideally, a primary system as similar to the current one as legally possible will be adopted by our Legislature. My goal is to avoid a radical change in our primary system – something clearly both of us wants.

The voters have made it abundantly clear to my office through their correspondence with me that they want to vote for the candidate, not the party. A top-two Washington primary system will result in the least radical change in partisan outcomes, as opposed to a closed primary. Strict party nominating processes under a closed primary would result in a marked decrease in voter turnout, fringe candidates, and deny Washington voters their freedom of candidate choice—which they have come to hold sacred.

There are two primary systems I am looking at supporting – the top-two moving forward system (modeled after Louisiana's) and the open primary private choice (modeled after Montana's) that allows voters to choose a ballot without that choice being recorded. I am addressing the top-two moving forward system in this letter to reply to your inquiries. If you have feedback on a Montana modeled system, I would appreciate receiving it from you.

By no means, am I advocating taking a replica of the Louisiana system and replacing ours with it. The primary system I am proposing is more closely modeled after our non-partisan elections currently held in Washington State. Instead, the system I endorse is based on the primary system the Washington State public is thoroughly accustomed to and using right now.

There are some fundamental features of the Louisiana primary, which should not be in place in Washington's new primary system. Louisiana requires party registration. Louisiana uses a 50% rule. Louisiana has runoff elections. The primary system I endorse does not have these aspects of the Louisiana primary within it. Instead, I support plurality, which is a part of the primary I am advocating.

I agree with you that the 50% rule is not beneficiary. The primary system I am promoting for Washington State, does not include this stipulation for exactly the reasons you stated in your letter.

I couldn't agree more that choice not radical change is needed. By using a top-two, non-partisan system, we are keeping many key factors in place. For instance, the ballot will look virtually identical to the one used in our current blanket primary. Also, this type of system will continue to allow voters to vote for the candidate not the party. Any other type of primary system severely reduces voter choices and insults our voters' strong sense of independence. This is a major reason why I am advocating a primary system that does not force our voters to choose a party ballot.

I absolutely agree that political party affiliation matters. It is in no way my goal to hinder the parties. My primary goal is to preserve the role of the voters. I strongly advocate the parties and whole-heartedly support party campaigning, candidate endorsement, candidate funding, etc. I can understand your concerns that only one political party may be represented in a general election, as a result of the primary system I am advocating. I am confident that candidates and voters will adapt to this new system to reduce instances in which two people from the same party move forward. Strategies will change, just as the when people began voting via absentee ballots. You may recall how the parties and voters had to switch gears on timing involved in campaigning and when to cast a vote by absentee ballot, when ongoing-absentee voting was authorized by the Legislature. Although the switch was difficult, it was also swift. The result is that on average, 70% of the votes cast in Washington State are via absentee ballot—clearly a voter preference.

Concerns are also expressed by you that the quality of the candidates will be weakened by disenfranchising the parties from the process. You express doubts that the Louisiana style of primary would diminish political orientation in candidates and cause voters to have more difficulty distinguishing differences among the candidates. I can understand why you may have reservations that a top-two system will encourage a ballot flooded by candidates. However, I just don't see this happening. Candidates for office will go through the same steps to be on the new primary system ballot as on the current system. There will be no changes in the processes to be on the ballot; thus, there should be no change on how this part of the primary system election will play out. Under no circumstances do I want the parties to decrease their efforts in recruiting strong candidates. They have been able to do so in the past and will be able to in the future.

You also address concerns that one party may have multiple candidates on the ballot, while another has just a couple candidates running for the same race. You understandably have concerns that the party running just a few candidates would come out ahead. I also had this concern and spoke with the former Governor of Louisiana and the current Louisiana Secretary of State to address this matter. They assured me that this lop-sided ballot issue is quickly discovered by the candidates, voters, and the political parties. All three of these groups will adjust to the new primary system I am advocating. The parties understand the implications and make sure that this does not happen. Also, because the voters quickly learn that this is a potential problem, they have more incentive to vote in their own parties.

I agree with you that Washington voters have a fairly good record of turnout. I can tell you from my contact with voters across the state that the turnout will decrease if a party-

identification ballot is forced. A perfect example of the voters' distaste for choosing a party ballot is the Presidential Primary election. By far, voters choose a non-partisan ballot in this election – even though the parties refused to use these votes to nominate candidates. An excellent example of the desire of the voters to have a non-partisan ballot occurred in California when they switched back from a blanket primary system to the closed primary system. In March 2000, under California's new blanket primary system, there was a **53.88% voter turnout**. After the primary system was struck down and they reverted back to a closed primary in February 2002, there was a **34.59% voter turnout**. The overwhelming majority of voters want a non-partisan ballot. This is the bottom line.

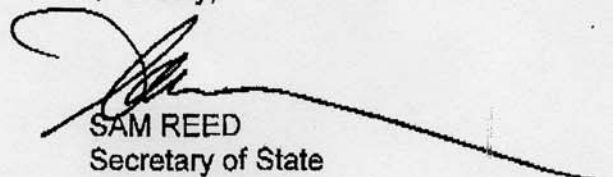
A concern you mention is that partisanship will be abandoned resulting in loosely formed coalitions, if we adopt a top-two primary system. Just the opposite occurred in Louisiana. When it adopted their current top-two primary system, the Democratic and Republican parties were actually revitalized. Now, the parties are even more vibrant at the local level. This is quite remarkable since the political parties were nearly dead prior to instituting the current primary system. Regardless of the primary system we implement, these coalitions will form as a result of members representing their districts.

I agree with you that political identification on the ballot is important. In the system I am promoting, candidates will still be able to identify themselves with a political philosophy. This is a difference between the Louisiana primary and the primary system I am promoting. I also agree with you that a top-two primary would necessitate candidates to conduct a more centrist campaign. Perhaps, this isn't necessarily a bad thing.

John, another concern you express is cross-over voting to sabotage another party's nominations. I can appreciate your concerns based on your own political experiences with the primary system. I recall all too well that nerve-racking primary, which you almost lost to Berentsen. However, the parties have learned from past mistakes. They understand that this is not the way to win elections. I feel confident that the parties will advocate to keep people voting for their own candidates – especially in a top-two, nonpartisan primary system.

I hope this letter clarifies my position on the alternate primary election system I am supporting. I also hope it garners some of your support. Please continue to give me your feedback—I value it.

Sincerely,



SAM REED
Secretary of State

SR: rh/jw